

SNOW HUTS OF THE ESQUIMAUX.

At the present time when the uncertainty of the safety of Sir John Franklin and his brave companions is engaging a great portion of the public attention, it may not be considered out of place to refer, in a brief manner, to the scene of their perils; and at the same time, delineate the dwellings and habits of the natives themselves.

For this purpose, we have introduced the subjoined engraving, representing a group of snow huts, the common residences of the hardy Esquimaux. These snow houses are generally erected near the banks of a river, and their construction is commenced by tracing out a circle of about 4 yards in diameter. The snow in the interior circle is then separated with a broad knife into slabs 3 feet long, 6 inches thick, and 2 feet deep, being the thickness of the layer of snow. These slabs are then piled upon each other like pieces of hewn stone, around the circle previously

described. During the erection of these snow walls, care is taken to give each slab a slight inclination inwards, which gradually closes in the roof, as the walls are raised, in a dome shape. The summit of the hut is about 8 feet, and the last aperture is closed in by a small conical-shaped slab of snow. These huts are built up from within, and each slab is so cut that it retains its position without requiring any support, until another slab is placed beside it. When the entire building is covered in, a little loose snow is thrown over it to close up every aperture, and a low door or hole is cut in the walls. A bed is next formed, and neatly faced up with snow slabs; it is then covered with skins, or if they can be had, thin layers of branches, to prevent the snow from being melted by the heat of the sleeper's body. A piece of thin transparent ice, let into a square opening near the roof, serves the inmates for a window.

The purity of the material of which these houses are constructed, and the translucency of the walls, give the whole a pleasing and light appearance, far superior to a marble building; and they may be surveyed with feelings similar to those produced by the contemplation of a Grecian temple, both being temples of art, inimitable in their kind.

While upon this subject, we take the opportunity of laying before our readers the following highly important extracts from the *Athenæum*.

"THE ARCTIC EXPEDITION.—The extreme interest which has been felt by the public in the fate of the long-missing Arctic Expedition, has been strongly illustrated by the avidity with which the report of its ascertained existence in March last was received. Seizing eagerly on the asserted fulfilment of a long-deferred hope, the press at once announced the actual safety of Sir John Franklin and his party; and as news generally travels with the properties of an avalanche, swelling in importance with every step, many hours had not elapsed before the return of the *Erebus* and *Terror* in the course of the present month was spoken of as an almost certain event. For ourselves, we had misgivings, which we thought it right to hint at, even in that first moment of excitement;—and we have since, with the coolness which a week of reflection gives, set ourselves carefully to weigh the arguments for and against the trustworthiness of the evidence offered. We are bound to say, even for the sake of those whose disappointment will be sorest if disappointment there shall finally be, that this inquiry has yielded a result wholly unsatisfactory to ourselves.

"The following letter, from Mr. Robert Goodsir, who sailed in the *Advice*, whaler, in her recent passage to Lancaster Sound, in search of the missing expedition, will be found interesting.

"Off Cape Macculloch, Aug. 1, 1849.

"We this morning had what might have been considered as cheering intelligence of the expedition;—Mr. Parker, the master of the *Truelove* of Hull, came on board to breakfast, and informed us that some Esquimaux, who had

been on board the *Chieftain*, of Kirkaldy, had sketched a Chart and pointed out to Mr. Kerr where both Sir John Franklin's and Sir James Ross's ships were lying,—the former being at Whaler Point, the latter at Port Jackson, at the entrance of Prince Regent's Inlet. Sir John Franklin had been beset in his present position for three winters. Sir James Ross had travelled in sledges from his own ships to Sir John Franklin's. They were all alive and well. The Esquimaux himself had been on board all *the four ships* three moons ago,—i.e. about the end of April or beginning of May. Mr. Parker seems confident as to the correctness of this information; and as his ship is nearly full, and he will proceed home very shortly, Mr. Kerr had given him the Chart which he said he intended to forward to the Admiralty, and to inform them of what he had learnt. All this was very pleasing intelligence; but when I began to consider, I soon saw much to throw doubt upon its correctness and authenticity. First, there was the extreme difficulty of extracting correct information of any kind from the Esquimaux, even by those best acquainted with their habits and language. A leading question they are sure to answer in the affirmative. Then, there is the great unlikelihood of Sir John Franklin being beset at a

spot so comparatively near to the constant resort of the whalers during the months of July and August—Pond Bay and its neighbourhood—for three summers and three winters without sending down despatches to them by the light boats fitted on sledges.

"Doubts of the trustworthiness of the Esquimaux's report had already arisen in the minds of Mr. Goodsir and his companions:—nevertheless, with a spirit of enterprise the *Advice* joined the *Truelove* in an attempt to reach Regent's Inlet for the solution of the question. Under the date of the 2nd of August, when off Cape Walter Bathurst Mr. Goodsir writes—

"You may conceive how delighted I am to find the *Advice* now running rapidly into Lancaster Sound with a smart breeze, and one, too, likely to last. If there is only land ice in Navy Board and Admiralty Inlet we are sure to get whales,—which will justify the master in taking this step. Had the other vessels been poorly fished many of them would have made the attempt to run up the Sound;—as it is, none of them will now do it."

"Mr. Goodsir's hopes of getting through the Sound were not of long duration. On the 10th of August he writes from Navy Board Inlet:—

"Since I last wrote we have had such a series of gales and storms that I have been unable to put pen to paper. About 4 o'clock on Saturday morning the 4th, it came on to blow from the eastward with thick weather. We had little or no ice hitherto, and what we had seen was exceedingly light. Everything looked well, and we were very sanguine that we should be able to gain some intelligence of the Expedition. Before it came on thick we could make out what we took to be Prince Leopold's Island at the mouth of Prince Regent's Inlet, and the ice apparently stretching right across the Sound; but the thickness came on so rapidly and the gale increasing to a perfect hurricane, prevented us making out anything accurately."

"Thus baffled, the party were obliged to give up further search. This is so melancholy a view of the case, that we are glad to hear that an opposite one is entertained by those who may be considered the great Arctic authorities. We have caused inquiries to be made—and such is the result. Sir George Back, who has had great intercourse with the native Esquimaux, declares 'that he never knew an Indian or an Esquimaux tracing to fail; and after deliberately weighing all the information, he is of opinion that *four ships* answering to those composing the two Expeditions, were seen some time in the spring of this year by the Esquimaux; but whether in Prince Regent's Inlet, or to the westward of Boothia is uncertain.' Capt. Parry, Col. Sabine, and Admiral Beaufort, are all in favour of the truth of the Esquimaux report."



ESQUIMAUX VILLAGE-

